

SB 460: AAC Compassionate Or Medical Parole And Credits Awarded For Release During An
Emergency Declaration

By Pierlette Jones

Hello Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and ranking members Senator Kissel,
Representative Fishbein, and all the distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Pierlette Jones, I am a Leader with the ACLU of Connecticut Smart Justice campaign,
and I am here to testify in support of SB 460, An Act Concerning Compassionate Or Medical
Parole and Credits Awarded For Release During An Emergency Declaration. No one should ever
again have to die in the custody of the Department of Corrections during a public health crisis.

I spent over 27 years incarcerated at the York Correctional Institution. I worked in hospice at
York caring for women in the final months and days of their lives. I am here to tell this
committee that many of those women should not have spent their final moments in prison. In
particular, I would like to speak about a one woman who I cared for. I won't say her name, but
she was well into her sixties and has been incarcerated for over 20 years. She has multiple
sclerosis, in addition to other medical issues. She poses a risk to no one, and she has family at
home who are willing and able to care for her.

The last 17 months I spent at York were during COVID. I don't think I can explain here how scary
and helpless it felt to be locked up during the pandemic. Prisons were never healthy places in
the first place. The DOC has been dealing with epidemic levels of Hepatitis C and HIV/AIDS for
years, as well as infectious diseases like MRSA. The inability of people who are incarcerated to
access quality medical care, whether due to budget cuts or unfilled staff vacancies or the end of
the relationship with UConn Health, has been known for a long time.

But when COVID-19 hit, Connecticut's jails and prisons went to an entirely new level of
unhealthiness. At one point, the DOC had a higher infection rate than any municipality in
Connecticut. Since the pandemic began, 29 people have died after becoming infected with
COVID-19 while in DOC custody. 8,374 incarcerated people have been infected. If we truly
respect the lives of people who are incarcerated, then a pandemic is exactly when
compassionate release should be easier to obtain.

SB 460 seeks to remedy this. SB 460 provides that the Board of Pardons and Parole shall
consider compassionate releases during public health emergencies. It recognizes that
incarcerated people are dependent upon the state for their health, since they cannot change
their living environments, cannot socially distance, cannot move freely for safety, and cannot
otherwise take the actions that people who aren't incarcerated are able to do.

I support SB 460 as a necessary step to ensure that no one ever dies in DOC custody during a
public health crisis again. I urge the members of this Committee to support this bill.

Thank you for listening to my testimony today.